F 459
.L8 P6

F 459
.L8 P6
Copy 1

Where Louisville Started

WRITTEN BY
CAPT. ALFRED PIRTLE,
Secretary Filson Club and Author "Life of Admiral Jouett" and "The Battle of Tippecanoe."

1910

F459
L9P6

LOUISVILLE, KY
PRESS OF
THE
BRADLEY & GILBERT CO.
INCORPORATED

The winter of 1777 was on, and Maj. George Rogers Clark, of the Virginia troops, traveled from Kentucky to Richmond, Va., to use his influence with Gov. Patrick Henry for the benefit of the new country and its people away out beyond the mountains. He told Gov. Henry of their want of protection from the Indians of north of the Ohio, and laid before him the plans he (Clark) had thoroughly thought out, that the best method of protecting the infant settlement was by attacking the British of Detroit, Vincennes and Kaskaskia, where lay the sources, of the Indian depredations. In addition to this point he pictured to the Governor, the value such an attack on the possessions and forces of the British would be, in the grand campaign to be waged during the coming year. Some months passed in preparation of the expedition, which had the full endorsement of Gov. Henry and the Military Committee.

The men were enrolled, equipped and assembled at Redstone on the Monongahela River (now called Brownsville, Pa.) during the spring of 1778, and Clark, promoted to Lieutenant Colonel, floated down to Fort Pitt, now Pittsburg, where the expedition completed its stores and ammunition, and started down the Ohio, early in the month of May, having something like eighty settlers traveling under the protection of the military part of the expedition. Moving slowly, camping on the shore at night, the fleet was moored to the trees on the shores of an island at the head of the Falls of the Ohio, May 27th, 1778.

Clark remained on this island some weeks, while the soldiers cleared a part of the trees away, made a stockade and cabins for the settlers to occupy, erected some store rooms to protect the military supplies which he left under the guard of ten men; and the large body of men, over 125, made short work, of the above mentioned improvements. The settlers planted a crop of corn on the island, which gave the name by which it has since been known in history, (Corn Island), but it has long since been swept away by the Ohio.

During an eclipse of the Sun, Lieutenant Colonel Clark with the main body of troops left the Falls of the Ohio, June 24, and in row boats proceeded rapidly down the Ohio, until he came to the ruins of

Ft. Massac, about 40 miles from the mouth of the Ohio, where he landed, and from there marched overland, and in the early part of July captured Kaskaskia and the other posts on the east bank of the Mississippi. It is not the intention in this sketch to give any account of this most remarkable man's extraordinary achievements on this campaign, but remember when you think of it, that Clark was not twenty-six years of age until the following November.

He did not forget his little band of people on the island at the Falls of the Ohio, for he sent them orders, by two messengers, (one was Simon Kenton) who reached there in September, on their way to Richmond, Va., with despatches for Gov. Henry, that they were to remove to the Mainland on the Kentucky shore and build a wooden fort and cabins in which to pass the next winter.

The hand of man had not then been laid upon the rocks and islands in the river, and the bottom of the river was laid bare in the season of low water, between Corn Island and the Kentucky shore and the people could move across without impediment. The woods gave them fuel, and food, from the game, which roamed in their depths. Water from a spring near at hand was a requisite, and this was found at the foot of the second bank of the river, and the site of the first fort was selected not far from this spring, which within the memory of the writer supplied a brewery, directly at the foot of 12th Street.

The building of the fort was done by the soldiers left by Clark, and the men of the little body of settlers under the direction of Richard Chenoweth, a housebuilder, who had brought his wife and children with him to make a home in the wilderness.

The bank of the river where they decided to place themselves, was a little higher than the ground now is and the location gave a view up and down the river for miles.

George Rogers Clark had been well educated in Virginia, his native State, was a good surveyor and made a clear map drawn to a scale of the young settlement in 1779, and the map, shows that the first settlement in Louisville was on the spot now occupied by the Conrad Shoe Co., on the South side of Rowan Street, about one hundred feet East of Twelfth Street. A few years ago the Filson Club appointed Col. R. T. Durrett, Mr. Donald McDonald, Miss Barlow, Mrs. Sallie Marshall Hardy, and Alfred Pirtle to make a personal inspection of the ground, and to locate the exact position of the first fort in Louisville.

SEP 1910

With the map in hand it was not at all difficult to reach the conclusion given above, that the fort was situated as stated in the preceding paragraph.

The trees were cut down and removed from sufficient space to erect a stockade and cabins to enclose a space approximating two hundred feet long, by one hundred wide. Block houses were built at the four corners, while eight cabins on each long side, which ran North and South, and four on each end, East and West, and the stockades between the cabins formed the enclosure, the cabins being with their backs to the outside and their doors opening on the "parade" as it came to be called. The block houses were two stories high, with the second story overhanging the lower (~~see extra notes~~) so that no enemy could get under the stockade in day light without being seen. The roofs of the cabins and block houses sloped to the inside of the fort. The main gate was near the northwest block house. All the brush was cleared away some hundred yards from the fort and afterwards the trees were cut down as the timber was needed.

The fort was habitable in December, and the first Christmas party in Louisville was given December 24, 25, 1778, in the northeast block house, which Richard Chenoweth finished in time for the great feast that was the principal part of the evening except the dancing by music furnished by Cato, the darkey fiddler of the settlement.

There is no question of the locality of the fort, for Col. Clark returned to Louisville, after his capture of Vincennes and made his headquarters there, while he built a larger and permanent fort at the foot of Seventh Street on Main Street in 1782.

Clark was a civil engineer and evidently saw the high water mark on the shore, hence his requiring the removal of the settlement from the island to the mainland before winter set in so they would be safely housed before an early spring flood.

To construct the fort as directed by Lieutenant Colonel Clark, the site was first selected and marked out by clearing the small trees and under brush from the outlines of the space that was to be enclosed. Then the trees within the area were cut down, the limbs trimmed off and the trunks made into logs of the proper length, either for making the block houses, the log cabins, the stockade, gates, doors, floors and roofs. Such wood as remained was chopped into pieces for firewood.

The tools mostly used by the pioneers were axes, saws and augers.

With an ax only a man skilled in handling it could get from the tree as it lay almost any part of the building he needed, that is, the logs that were to make the walls and windows, the flat pieces that were used for the floor, and the split pieces (clapboards) to go upon the rafters and make the roof. Pins trimmed from the smaller pieces, to take the place of bolts or nails, were used to fasten the various parts of the building together. Having raised the house to the proper height, the rafters, split out of young trees, were placed on the walls and made secure at the proper angle to throw off the rain and snow, and instead of nails driven into each clapboard that made the roof, long timbers were laid lengthwise of the roof; on these clapboards were laid, and on them, other long pieces were placed in which holes were bored and long wooden pins driven in so as to hold the two long pieces and the clapboards all together.

The doors, of straight grained wood, split and smoothed with the ax, were hung on wooden hinges, fastened by wooden pins to a wooden frame. A large latch, also of wood, dropped into a wooden catch on the door frame inside the cabin. Above the latch was a hole in the door, through which the latch string hung down on the outside so that the latch could be raised from without, and a sign that one must knock or ask to be admitted was made by taking the latch string inside. Hence the saying "Hang the latch string out" as a sign of hospitable welcome. The windows had no glass for many years after the settlement of the State, but there were wooden shutters hung to close very much the same as the doors, except the latch was not used, but a hole was bored in a log or part of the frame, at an angle that would admit a piece of wood to be placed, so as to keep the shutter firmly closed against wind or against an enemy. The fire place was large, deep and ample in every way, for wood cost nothing except labor, and a fire burned all the time for light or cooking. Where stone was near, the chimney was built of it, or if it was scarce or difficult to get, the walls of the chimney were made of sticks of wood laid upon each other with a thick coat of mud between, and a liberal application of it on the inside where it soon baked hard. But there were chimneys that took fire, yet it was seldom, and many a cabin escaped entirely.

As the fort was building the space to be occupied by each cabin was laid off, and that space between them was to be filled with a stockade. The timber for this was taken from small trees, cut to about fifteen feet

long and split down the center. One end of each piece was sharpened with the ax so that the pieces of timber when placed on end and so close together that there were no places for a bullet to go through, formed an edge like a saw. To put the stockade in place a trench was dug deep enough to put the timbers three feet, at least, in the ground thus making them too high for a man to scale unless with the help of a ladder of some kind. The earth was rammed tight around the stockade, and in a few months it was perfectly firm. These pieces of wood were selected with care so as not to have any places where bullets could get through, be heavy enough to turn the bullets or stroke of a tomahawk if thrown against it; in fact, resist anything but the fire of cannons.

In 1782 Clark, promoted to Brig. General, built the second fort, named Fort Nelson for the Governor of Virginia, at Seventh Street and the river, which he made more substantial than the first fort.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 014 571 988 4

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 014 571 988 4